



Analysis of Artifacts from Marshall’s Senior Capstone Courses Academic Year 2020 – 2021

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Executive Summary

Recommendations from the 2020 Summer Assessment Team

The Summer Assessment Team made the following recommendations:

1. That we reconsider using the *Inquiry and Analysis* rubric in addition to the *Critical Thinking* rubric. The reason for this recommendation was that, although the *Inquiry and Analysis* rubric may align more closely with some capstone projects than does the *Critical Thinking* rubric, the major difference between the two is the presence of the trait influence of context and assumptions, which appears on the *Critical Thinking* rubric. There was discussion that, if the university deems it important that students who earn degrees from Marshall University develop critical thinking skills or, as one Team member put it, learn to “think like a critic,” then it is important that they complete projects that allow all the traits of the *Critical Thinking* rubric (including the influence of context and assumptions) to be evaluated. Another Team member noted that critical thinking is central to every discipline and suggested that we think of critical thinking as “having a questioning mindset.” It

is important that the foundation laid in First Year Seminar in Critical Thinking and in Critical Thinking courses at the 100/200 levels be reinforced and enhanced in program-level courses at the 300/400 levels. The project chosen for university-level assessment should be embedded in a 400-level course, but it does not have to be the capstone project. The Team recommended further discussions regarding this point with Marshall's Provost, the Councils of Deans and Chairs, and with the General Education Council. **The Summer Assessment Team shared these concerns with Marshall's Provost in fall 2020 but, largely due to the challenges posed by the pandemic, did not follow-up with the other groups. We did, however, decide this spring to combine AAC&U's Critical Thinking and Inquiry and Analysis Value Rubrics into one modified rubric. In doing so, we did not use one trait of each rubric (influence of context and assumptions for Critical Thinking and Limitations and Implication for Inquiry and Analysis).**

2. That we share results of the past three years of capstone project assessments with the constituencies named in recommendation 1. Given that the main findings regarding relative strengths and weaknesses have remained consistent over three years of assessment, it is important that we expand conversations regarding how we can use this information to make meaningful changes in curricula or pedagogy to effect improvements in student learning. We have established a team within Microsoft Teams for the purpose of communicating assessment results and the Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives will condense this report to a shorter, more digestible format, for widespread dissemination. **We included a shorter, more digestible report in Microsoft Teams. However, we need to share the report more widely.**
3. That we make the AAC&U rubrics we are using widely available and, for applied disciplines, provide a suggested outline that follows the AAC&U's *Critical Thinking* rubric as a guide for students to develop process papers outlining and reflecting on how they have used the specified critical thinking skills in developing and completing their projects. We recommend that we work with the Center for Teaching and Learning to continue these conversations. **Although the rubrics we shared the rubrics we use with all chairs during academic year 2017-2018, we did not widely disseminate these rubrics last year.**
4. That we continue to work closely with the Online Design Center. As more faculty use Blackboard, the Design Center staff are in a unique position to help faculty make appropriate assignment alignments that make student artifacts accessible for university-wide assessment. **The MU Online Design Center staff continue to be a valuable advocate and resource for faculty in designing their courses to assess student learning and to make the alignments necessary to make student work available for the Summer Assessment Team.**

Background

In June 2017 the Assessment Team conducted a pilot assessment in which they scored a small sample of capstone project artifacts using the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U's) *Critical Thinking* and *Written Communication* Value rubrics. Given the difficulty we have experienced over the years in drawing representative samples of seniors to complete either the *Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+)* or Marshall's Senior Assessment, we recommended that staff from the Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives encourage degree programs'

capstone instructors to align their capstone assignments to the “Capstone Critical Thinking” outcome in Blackboard and to require students to submit their final projects using Blackboard’s assignment module. We recommended that these discussions be incorporated into larger discussions regarding the process of creating assignments in Blackboard and aligning them to appropriate outcomes of Marshall’s Baccalaureate Degree Profile (BDP). We felt that this had the potential to allow us to evaluate a truly random sample of artifacts from multiple degree programs and to apply validated rubrics to assess work that students complete as part of their degree programs. Staff from the Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives and the Online Design Center met with chairs and deans in most of Marshall’s academic colleges during academic year 2017-2018 to ask that they encourage capstone instructors to follow the instructions outlined above. This year marks our fourth summer (since the initial pilot project) to assess senior capstone projects. The number of senior capstone artifacts submitted during academic year 2020-2021 was 226 from twelve academic disciplines. After reviewing sample artifacts from two disciplines, the Summer Assessment Team determined that, in one case, they did not all align to the AAC&U rubrics we planned to use for evaluation. In the second case, they files were such that they could not be easily accessed for evaluation. Elimination of artifacts from these disciplines reduced the number of usable artifacts to 191 from ten disciplines. From these, we sampled 184 artifacts for assessment. These artifacts came from disciplines within the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Business, Health Professions, and Science.

Procedures for 2021 Assessment

General Procedures

Eight faculty representing the Colleges of Business, Liberal Arts, and Science served as the assessment team for this project. They evaluated each capstone artifact using a rubric to evaluate *Critical Thinking* that was modified from AAC&U’s *Critical Thinking* and *Inquiry and Analysis* value rubrics (please refer to supporting documentation at the end of this report to view the resulting rubric). We used AAC&U’s *Written Communication* Value rubric or evaluate students’ writing skills. This project was coordinated by the Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives.

Scoring Procedures

Evaluators assessed each artifact using the following scale:

Scoring Codes	
N/A	In the judgment of the evaluators, the assignment the artifacts addressed did not align with the specific trait of the outcome being assessed.
1	The artifact demonstrated Level 1 performance.
2	The artifact demonstrated Level 2 performance.
3	The artifact demonstrated Level 3 performance.
4	The artifact demonstrated Level 4 performance.

Please see the supporting information that follows this summary for a detailed explanation of scoring procedures.

General Information about the Sample

Of the 184 artifacts assessed, 31 were from the Lewis College of Business, 47 from the College of Health Professions, 52 from the College of Liberal Arts, and 54 from the College of Science. The Assessment Team concluded that one capstone assignment did not require students to complete work that aligned with the last two traits of the *Critical Thinking* rubric we used, leaving 177 artifacts aligning to those traits.

Results and Analysis

One challenge in reporting results of the capstone assessment is that, although we assessed 184 artifacts for *Critical Thinking* and for *Written Communication*, each was analyzed by rubric outcome trait. The total number of traits across the two outcome rubrics was nine (four for *Critical Thinking* and five for *Written Communication*), potentially resulting in a total of 736 total trait scores for *Critical Thinking* and 920 for *Written Communication*. However, evaluators determined that two traits of the *Critical Thinking* rubric we used did not align to seven of the 184 artifacts we evaluated, reducing the number traits aligned to the *Critical Thinking* rubric to 722. The chart below provides the total scorable traits for each outcome, along with mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency counts.

Outcome	Trait (AAC&U adapted rubric [CT] and rubric [WC])	Total Traits Aligned	Mean Score (SD)	Number of Students Scoring 2.5 – 4	Number of Students Scoring 3.5 – 4
Critical Thinking	Issues/Topic	184	2.64 (0.50)	155 (84%)	12 (7%)
	Evidence/Existing Knowledge	184	2.49 (0.58)	125 (68%)	15 (8%)
	Position/Analysis	177	2.56 (0.59)	128 (72%)	14 (8%)
	Conclusions	177	2.43 (.060)	113 (64%)	11 (6%)
Total for Critical Thinking		722		521 (72%)	52 (7%)
Written Communication	Context/Purpose	184	2.79 (0.49)	167 (91%)	21 (11%)
	Content	184	2.60 (0.60)	144 (78%)	15 (8%)
	Genre	184	2.77 (0.50)	162 (88%)	23 (13%)
	Evidence	184	2.73 (0.55)	156 (85%)	25 (14%)
	Syntax/Mechanics	184	2.61 (0.59)	144 (78%)	15 (8%)
Total for Written Communication		920		773 (84%)	99 (11%)

A series of paired-samples *t*-tests were used to determine whether there were significant differences among trait means for each outcome. We used Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of .005 (for Written Communication) and .008 (for Critical Thinking) to control for Type 1 error. These analyses showed the following results:

Critical Thinking: The mean for explanation of issues/topic selection was significantly higher than means for evidence/existing knowledge and conclusions and related outcomes. The mean for student's position/analysis was significantly higher than the mean for conclusions and related outcomes.

Written Communication: The mean for context and purpose of writing was significantly higher than those for content development and control of syntax and mechanics. The mean for sources and evidence was significantly higher than the mean for content development. The mean for genre and disciplinary conventions was significantly higher than those for content development and control of syntax and mechanics.

Conclusion

While 72% of artifacts in this sample received final scores between 2.5 and 4.0 on *critical thinking* and 84% scored within this range on *written communication*, we were disappointed that only 7% had scores of 3.5 or 4 on *critical thinking* with 11% scoring in this range on *written communication*. We note that a final score of 2.5 indicates that one reviewer scored the artifact at level 3, but the other reviewer scored the artifact at level 2. Likewise, a score of 3.5 indicates that one reviewer scored the artifact at level 4, and another at level 3. We expect that, by the time of graduation, students should minimally be working at level 3.

Within *Critical Thinking*, explanation of issues/topic selection emerged as a relative strength and conclusions and related outcomes a significant weakness. Explanation of issues has been a relative strength for the past three years. The trait influence of context and assumptions, that had been a relative weakness, possibly because it is not addressed as part of the Baccalaureate Degree Profile, was included in our evaluation this year.

Within *Written Communication*, context of and purpose of writing emerged as a relative strength, while content development and control of syntax and mechanics were relative weaknesses. Content development was a new weakness this year, but the other results mirror those from the past three assessment cycles.

Recommendations from the 2021 Summer Assessment Team

The Sumer Assessment Team made the following recommendations:

1. As mentioned earlier in this report, we noted alignment between four of the traits of AAC&U's *Critical Thinking* rubric with five of the traits of its *Inquiry and Analysis Value* rubric. This led us to combine the rubrics, resulting in a single rubric that applied to culminating artifacts from courses in the humanities with those from the social and natural sciences. However, in developing this new rubric, we omitted influence of context and assumptions (a trait from AAC&U's Critical Thinking Value rubric, which had been a significant weakness in capstone artifacts assessed during the previous three review cycles) and limitations and implications (a trait from AAC&U's Inquiry and Analysis Value rubric). We note that these traits do not appear as part of any of Marshall University's Baccalaureate Degree Profile outcomes. That said, since students are introduced to considering the influence of context and assumptions during their First Year Seminar in Critical Thinking, we recommend consideration of this element of critical thinking be incorporated into discussions of potential revisions to the Baccalaureate Degree Profile.
2. That the Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives continue to provide and distribute shorter reports in more digestible formats. We recommend that these reports be disseminated campus-wide through the Assessment Newsletter and shared with the Faculty Senate.
3. That we work with the Center for Teaching and Learning to form a committee of faculty to determine the most appropriate rubrics to use for assessment of capstone projects and to evaluate whether there is a need for modifications to some of our existing Baccalaureate Degree Profile outcomes (refer to recommendations from the Baccalaureate Degree Profile Assessment Report).
4. That we continue to work closely with the Online Design Center. As more faculty use Blackboard, the Design Center staff are in a unique position to help faculty make appropriate assignment alignments that make student artifacts accessible for university-wide assessment.



Supporting Documentation



**MARSHALL
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**Capstone
Artifact Assessment**

Academic Year 2020 – 2021

Outcomes Assessed: Modified AAC&U Rubrics

Outcome	Abbreviation	Traits	Abbreviations
Critical Thinking or Inquiry and Analysis	CT	Explanation of Issues OR Topic Selection	Issues/Topic
		Evidence OR Existing Knowledge	Evidence/Existing Knowledge
		Student's Position OR Design Process and Analysis	Position/Analysis
		Conclusions and Related Outcomes/Conclusions	Conclusions
Written Communication	WC	Context and Purpose of Writing	Context/Purpose
		Content Development	Content
		Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	Genre
		Sources and Evidence	Evidence
		Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Syntax/Mechanics

Review Procedures

- Each artifact had two independent raters and usable scores on the 1 – 4 scale were determined in the following manner:
 - If raters assigned the same score, that became the score for the artifact.
 - If raters' scores differed by one point, e.g., Rater 1 assigned a score of 1 and Rater 2 a score of 2, the final score was the mean, i.e., 1.5.
 - If raters' scores differed by more than one point, e.g., Rater 1 assigned a score of 1 and Rater 2 a score of 3, the raters met to discuss the rationale for their scores to see if they could agree on a score or, at minimum, scores that differed by no more than one point.
 - If raters' scores differed by more than one point and, after discussion, they were not able to resolve the differences, a third rater was assigned to review the artifact. (For this review, all raters were able to come to agreement, so third raters were not needed).

Interrater Reliability

- We conducted interrater reliability analyses using the Cohen's Kappa statistical procedure. In so doing, we used the following rules, similar to those suggested Stellmack, Kohneim-Kalkstein, Manor, Massey, & Schmitz (2009):
 - Since our scoring procedure was to average final scores between two raters when scores differed by only one point, we used that averaged score (e.g., 1.5) as the score for both raters, counting it as an agreement in the interrater reliability analysis.
 - For scores that were two or more points apart, the original score of each reviewer was used in the analysis. Therefore, these scores were counted as disagreements.

Critical Thinking Rubric

Modified from AAC&U Critical Thinking and Inquiry and Analysis Value Rubrics (Page 1)

This rubric was created using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>

AAC&U Value Rubrics (Critical Thinking and Inquiry/Analysis Combined)

Traits	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Explanation of Issues OR Topic Selection	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description. OR Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown. OR Identifies a topic that, while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions. OR Identifies a focused and manageable/doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding. OR Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of the topic.
Evidence (Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion) OR Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views	Information is taken from sources without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question. OR Presents information from irrelevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Information is taken from sources with some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis of synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning. OR Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Information is taken from sources with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning. OR Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Information is taken from sources with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly. OR Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.
Student's Position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) OR Design Process and Analysis	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious. OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry design demonstrates a misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework. • Lists evidence, but it is not organized and/or is unrelated to the focus. 	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue. OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are missing, incorrectly developed, or unfocused. • Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing 	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis). OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed; however, more subtle 	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis). OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All elements of the methodology or

Critical Thinking Rubric

Modified from AAC&U Critical Thinking and Inquiry and Analysis Value Rubrics (Page 2)

This rubric was created using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>

Page 2

Traits	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
		important patterns, differences, or similarities.	elements are ignored or unaccounted for. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus. 	theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized from across disciplines or from relevant subdisciplines. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.
Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences) OR Conclusions	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified. OR States an ambiguous, illogical, or unsupportable conclusion from Inquiry findings.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. OR States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. OR States a conclusion focused solely on the Inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to the inquiry findings.	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order. OR States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.

Written Communication AAC&U Value Rubric

AAC & U Written Communication Value Rubric

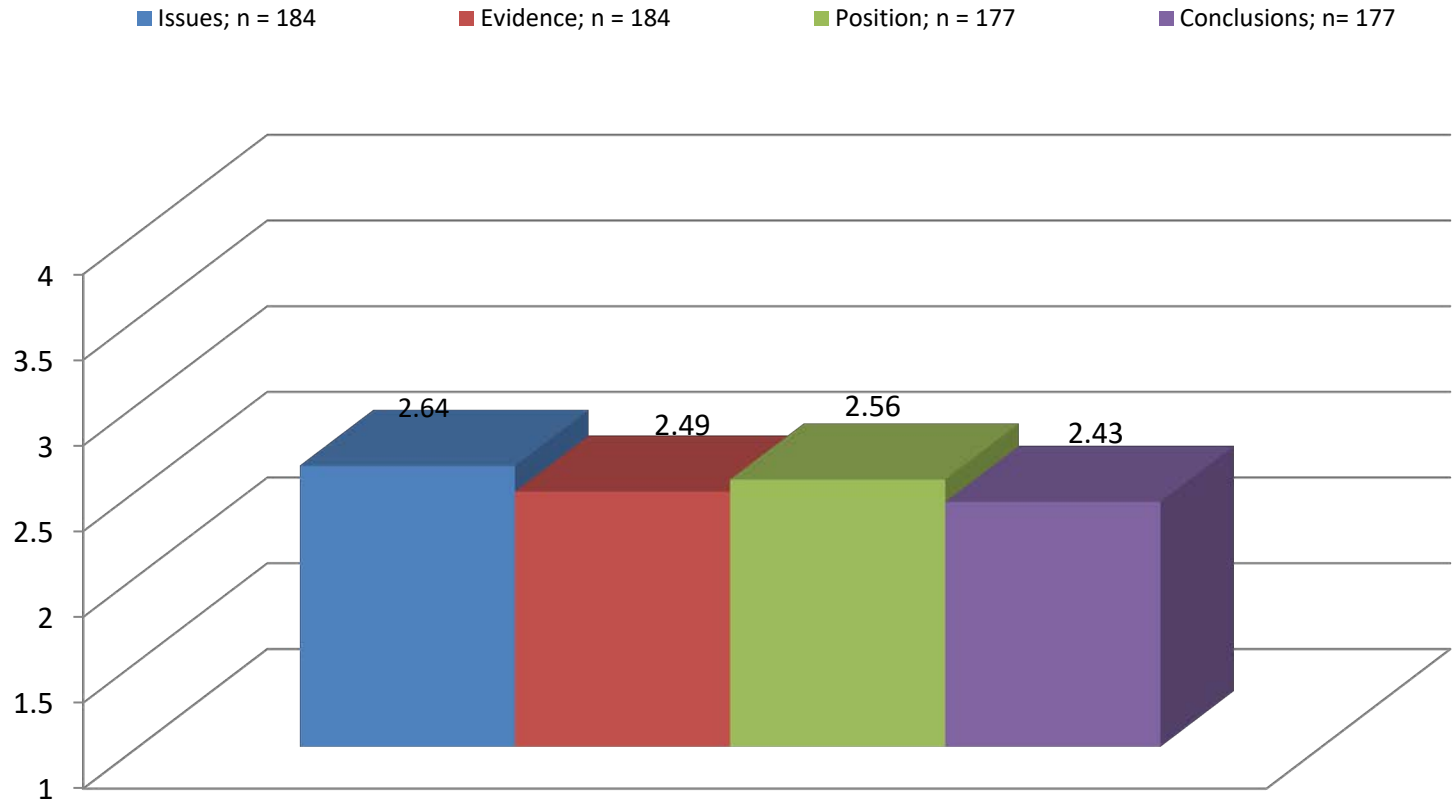
Traits	N/A	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Context of and Purpose for Writing <i>Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).</i>	Does not apply to this assignment.	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.
Content Development	Does not apply to this assignment.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions <i>Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).</i>	Does not apply to this assignment.	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.	Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation	Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task (s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices
Sources and Evidence	Does not apply to this assignment.	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Does not apply to this assignment.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.

Critical Thinking: Overall Analysis

Mean Scores on a scale of 1 – 4, with 4 being the highest possible score.

Please note that, while 184 artifacts in this sample aligned to *Critical Thinking*, seven artifacts aligned to issues and evidence only.

AAC&U Rubric

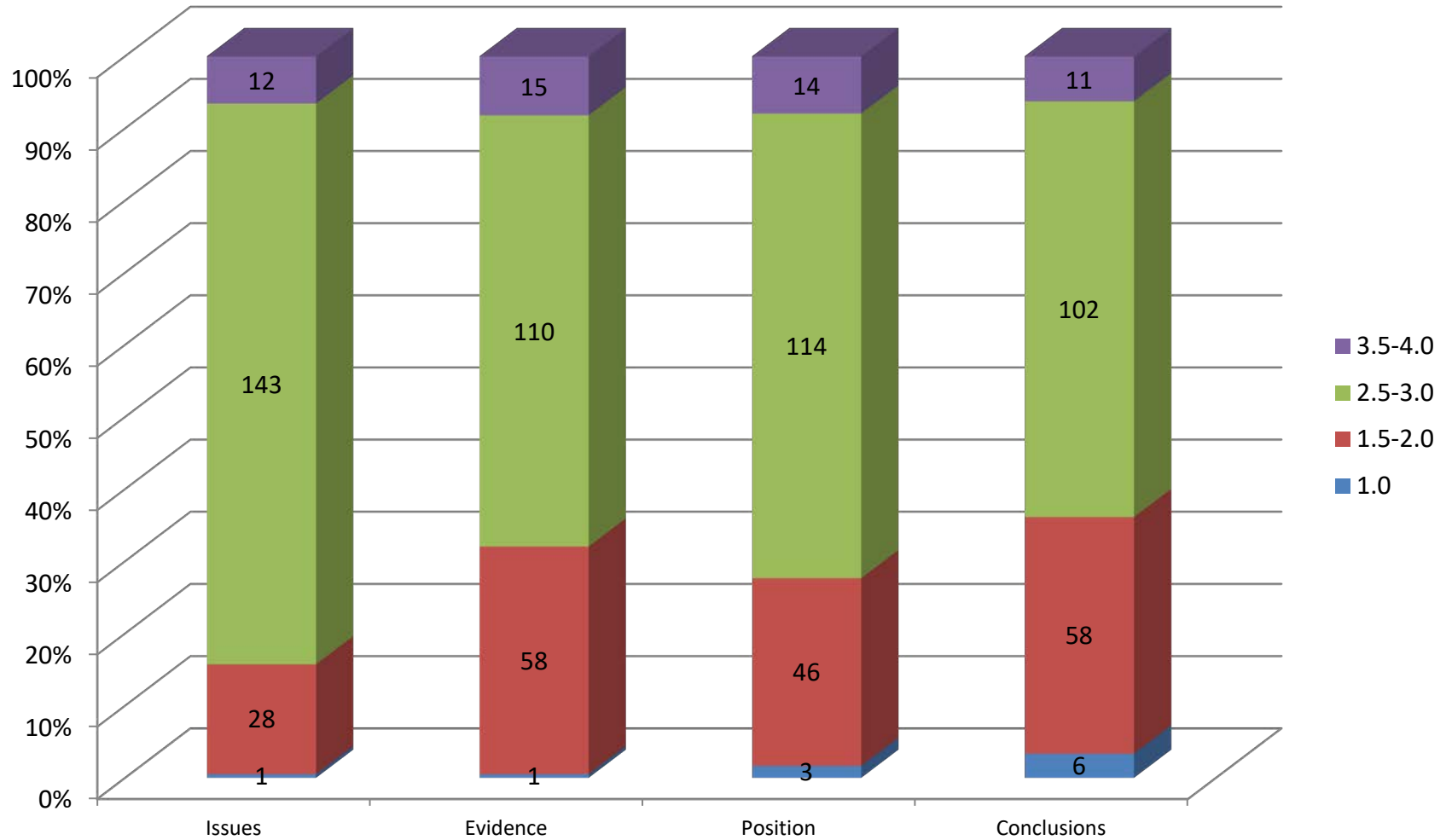


Critical Thinking

Number of artifacts scoring at each performance level

Trait/ Performance Level	Issues	Evidence	Position	Conclusions	Total
1.0	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	6 (3%)	11 (2%)
1.5 – 2.0	28 (15%)	58 (32%)	46 (26%)	58 (33%)	190 (26%)
2.5 – 3.0	143 (78%)	110 (60%)	114 (64%)	102 (58%)	469 (65%)
3.5 – 4.0	12 (7%)	15 (8%)	14 (8%)	11 (6%)	52 (7%)
Totals	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	177 (100%)	177 (100%)	722 (100%)

Critical Thinking



Critical Thinking

Inter-Rater Agreement Results

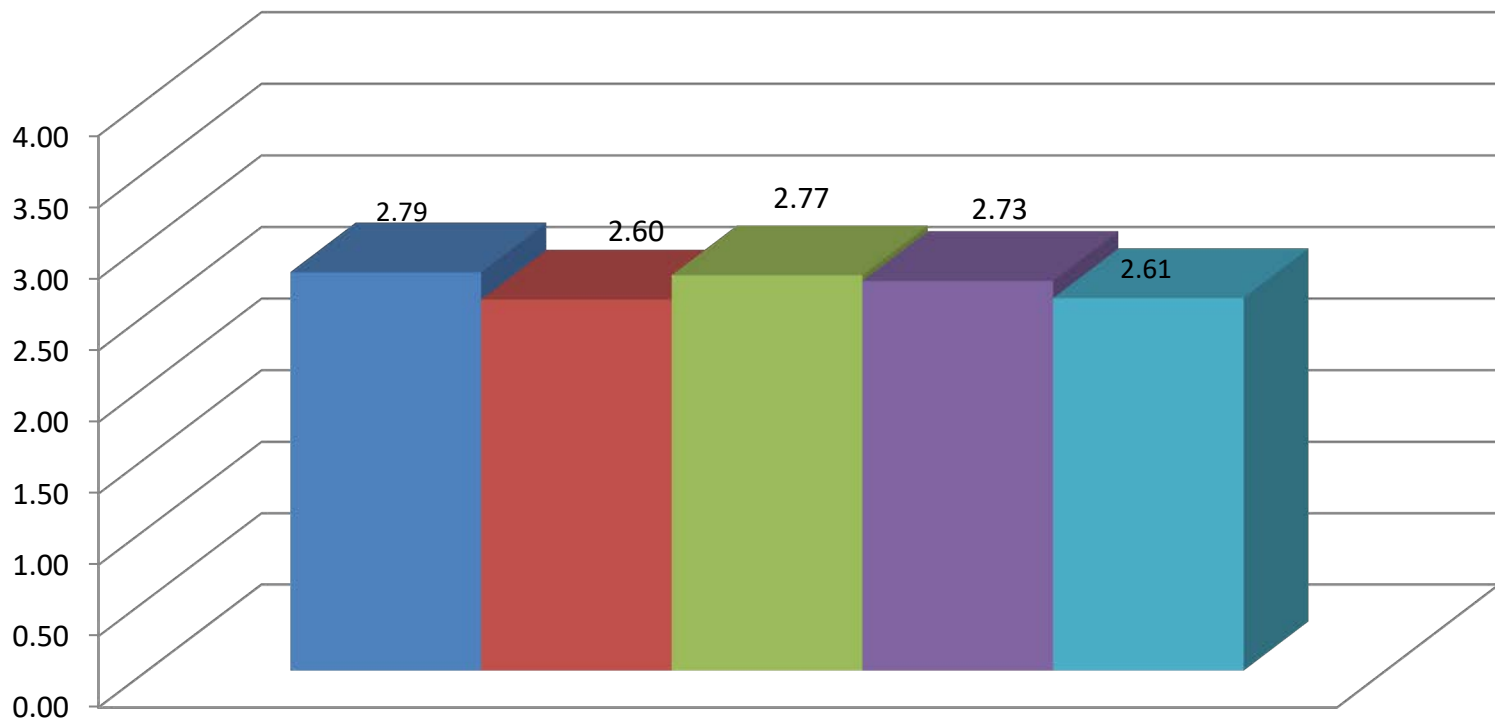
Trait/ Performance Level	Issues Kappa Liberal = .928	Evidence Kappa Liberal = .943	Position Kappa Liberal = .854	Conclusions Kappa Liberal = .897
Agree on Usable Score	80 (43%)	81 (44%)	80 (43%)	80 (43%)
Difference = 1 point	95 (52%)	95 (52%)	76 (41%)	82 (45%)
Difference = 2 points	8 (4%)	8 (4%)	21 (11%)	13 (7%)
Difference = 3 points	1 (1%)	0	0	2 (1%)
Agree on Not Aligned	0	0	7 (4%)	7 (4%)
Total	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	184 (100%)

Written Communication: Overall Analysis

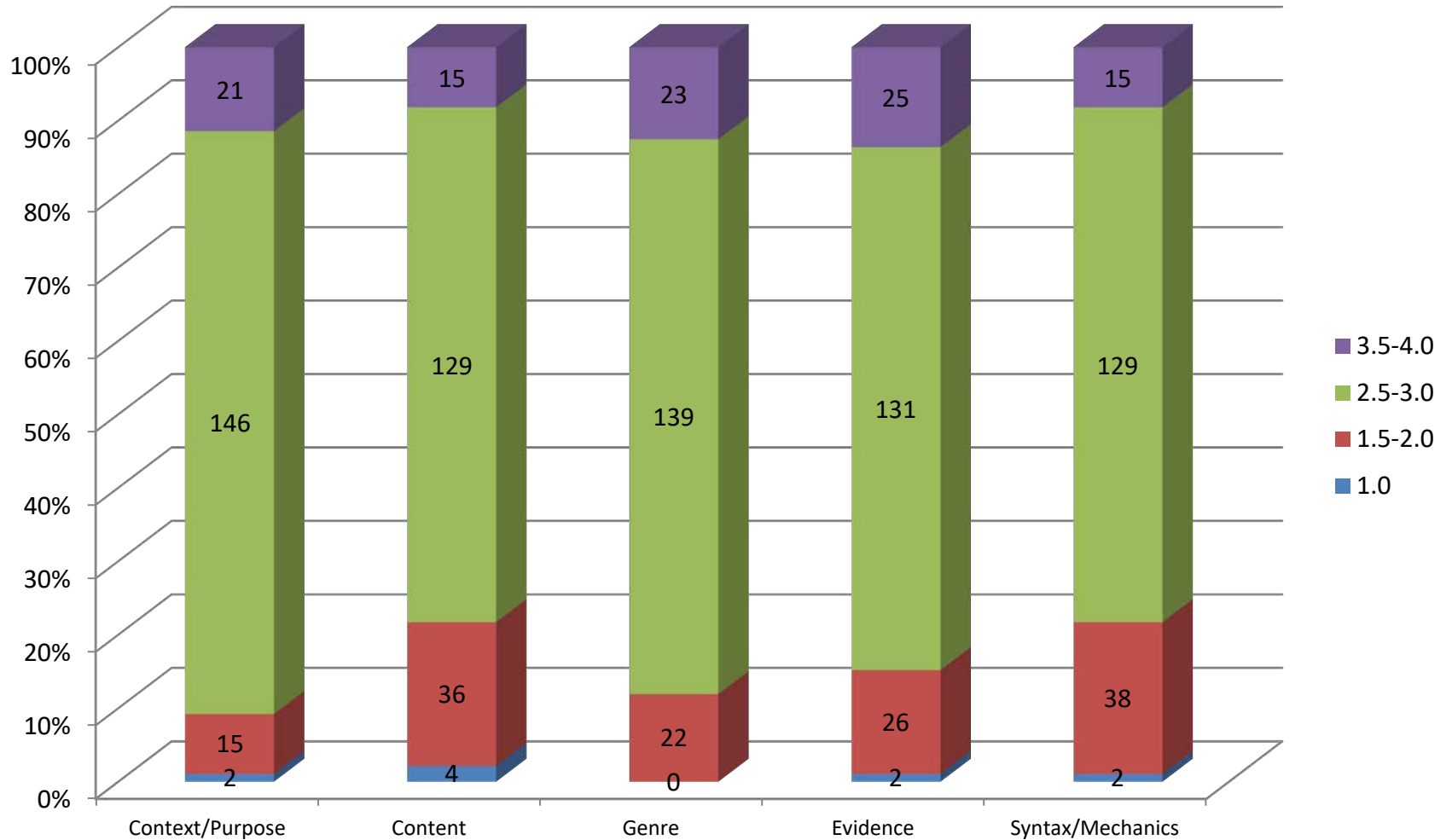
Mean Scores on a scale of 1 – 4, with 4 being the highest possible score.

AAC&U Rubric

■ Context/Purpose; n = 184 ■ Content; n = 184 ■ Genre; n = 184 ■ Evidence; n = 184 ■ Syntax/Mechanics; n = 184



Written Communication



Written Communication

Inter-Rater Agreement Results

Trait/ Performance Level	Context/Purpose Kappa Liberal = .918	Content Kappa Liberal = .866	Genre Kappa Liberal = .938	Evidence Kappa Liberal = .901	Syntax/Mechanics Kappa Liberal = .901
Agree on Usable Score	95 (52%)	83 (45%)	94 (51%)	91 (49%)	92 (50%)
Difference = 1 point	79 (43%)	83 (45%)	82 (45%)	80 (43%)	79 (43%)
Difference = 2 points	10 (5%)	18 (10%)	8 (4%)	12 (7%)	13 (7%)
Difference = 3 points	0	0	0	1 (1%)	0
Agree on Not Aligned	0	0	0	0	0
Total	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	184 (100%)	184 (100%)

References

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). (2009). *Critical thinking VALUE rubric*. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/critical-thinking>

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). (2009). *Inquiry and analysis VALUE rubric*. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/inquiry-analysis>

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Stellmack, M.A., Kohneim-Kalkstein, Y. L, Manor, J. E., Massey, A. R., & Schmitz, J. A. P. (2009). An assessment of reliability and validity of a rubric for grading APA-style introductions. *Teaching of Psychology, 36*, 102-107.